

NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6091
LARRY LESUEUR

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CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

ANNCR:

AMERICAN CONCEPTS OF REHABILITATING THE PRISON POPULATION ARE UNDERGOING EXPERIMENTATION AND EVOLUTION. VOA'S LARRY LESUEUR HAS BEEN LOOKING INTO THE SITUATION AND HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT. VOICE:

CONFINEMENT HAS BEEN THE TRADITIONAL PUNISHMENT METED OUT TO CRIMINALS IN ALL CIVILIZATIONS, THE UNITED STATES, INCLUDED. AND ALTHOUGH THE DEATH PENALTY IS STILL ON AMERICAN LAWBOOKS FOR THE CRIME OF MURDER, WITH A NUMBER OF PRISONERS UNDER SUCH SENTENCE TODAY, ONLY ONE PERSON HAS BEEN EXECUTED IN THE UNITED STATES IN RECENT YEARS. INDEED, AMERICAN COURTS AND STATE LEGISLATURES HAVE BEEN TIGHTENING THE STANDARDS UNDER WHICH A DEATH SENTENCE CAN BE HANDED DOWN. SO THE LOSS OF LIBERTY IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED THE MOST SEVERE PUNISHMENT. BUT, ALONG WITH THAT, THE NOTION THAT PRISONERS SHOULD OCCUPY THEMSELVES DOING HARD MANUAL LABOR IS CHANGING.

DECADES AGO MOST AMERICAN STATES ABANDONED THE PRACTICE OF WORKING CONVICTS IN ROADSIDE SO-CALLED CHAIN-GANGS UNDER THE WATCHFUL EYES OF ARMED GUARDS. AND NOW EVEN SUCH TRADITIONAL PRISON INDUSTRIES AS MAKING WORK CLOTHES OR AUTOMOBILE LICENSE PLATES, WHILE STILL IN EXISTENCE, ARE GIVING WAY TO MORE MODERN ENTERPRISES SUCH AS OPTICAL LENS-GRINDING, UPHOLSTERING, AUTO REPAIR, PRINTING, TYPING, RECORD-KEEPING, COMPUTER PROGRAMMING AND EVEN THE MAKING OF ARTIFICIAL TEETH. THE IDEA IS THAT PRISONS SHOULD TEACH MARKETABLE SKILLS AND REFLECT AMERICAN SOCIETY, WITH ITS REGULAR PAY-CHECKS AND EIGHT-HOUR SHIFTS. IN

SOME STATE PRISONS, INMATES CAN NOW EARN FROM TWO-AND-A-HALF TO FIVE DOLLARS AN HOUR MAKING ARTICLES SUCH AS CHILDREN'S TOYS THAT ARE SOLD TO THE PUBLIC.

IT FOLLOWS, OF COURSE, THAT SOME OF THE MODERN PRISON WORK DEMANDS BETTER EDUCATION SO THE OPPORTUNITY TO "GO" TO HIGH SCHOOL AND EVEN COLLEGE IS BEING OFFERED AT SOME CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS. NOT LONG AGO, FOR EXAMPLE, THE MAYOR OF WASHINGTON ADDRESSED GRADUATION EXERCISES FOR TWENTY LONG-TERM LOCAL PRISON INMATES WHO HAD WON COLLEGE DIPLOMAS BY TAKING CORRESPONDENCE COURSES.

SOME PRISON SYSTEMS EVEN PERMIT INMATES TO WORK OUTSIDE PENAL INSTITUTIONS. AT LEAST SEVENTEEN STATES HAVE INSTITUTED SO-CALLED WORK RELEASE PROGRAMS THAT PERMIT PRISONERS TO HOLD PAID, OUTSIDE JOBS DURING THE DAY BUT REQUIRE THEM TO RETURN TO PRISON AT NIGHT. BECAUSE OF SECURITY PROBLEMS, THE NUMBER OF PRISONERS IN SUCH PROGRAMS IS STILL RELATIVELY SMALL BUT SOME PRISON OFFICIALS SAY SUCH WORK RELEASE PROGRAMS ARE SO SUCCESSFUL THEY WANT TO EXPAND THEM. THEY CONTEND THAT WORK-RELEASE PROGRAMS REACQUAINT INMATES WITH LIFE OUTSIDE AND GIVE THE PRISONERS A REASON FOR SELF-PRIDE.

WJL/RD